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A HISTORY OF THE
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

WITH ITS DEPARTMENTS OF
ART, MUSIC, SPEECH & DRAMATIC ARTS, AND COMMUNICATIONS

By Oliver R. Smith

THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Establishment of the College

At the mid-point of Brigham Young University's first century, when the institution was gaining academic strength under its fourth president, a bold innovation was made by the establishment of a College of Fine Arts. Although many universities had begun to accord academic standing to education in the arts and to set up departments to offer cultural courses, there was almost no precedent for the formation of a full-fledged college to combine such departments under a dean. Indeed, it was more than two decades later that other universities in Utah and other western states eventually followed the pattern which B.Y.U. pioneered in 1925.

When Franklin S. Harris assumed the presidency of the University in 1921, its undergraduate studies were organized into two divisions: the School of Education and the School of Arts and Sciences. The latter embraced a score of academic departments, including Art, Music, and Public Speaking and Dramatic Art. Instruction in these fields had been given on the secondary school level since the beginning of Brigham Young Academy, and on the college level since the establishment of its collegiate department in 1897. The cumulative total of college students enrolled in the University, however, was only 438 in 1920-21.

During the first year of the Harris administration the Schools of Education and Arts and Sciences were renamed as Colleges, and two more were added: the College of Commerce and Business Administration (later renamed College of Commerce) and the College of Applied Science. Also formed were the Extension Division, Research Division, and Graduate Division (later named the Graduate School). This was the pattern of organization through 1924-25, by which time the cumulative enrollment had leaped to 1,204.

In a meeting on Tuesday, April 21, 1925, the Board of Trustees acted upon the recommendation of Dr. Harris to form a fifth undergraduate college-- the College of Fine Arts. At the weekly faculty meeting at noon on the following Monday, "President Harris reported the organization of a new College of Fine Arts to include the work of the Departments of Art, Music, and Public Speaking and Dramatic Art."¹ This completed the undergraduate college structure of the University which continued unchanged throughout the remaining 20 years of the Harris administration and also the McDonald period which followed.

On the surface, it might seem odd that Dr. Harris, a scientist all his life, should father a new college for the arts while most administrators in his day considered such studies less acceptable on the university level than the traditional fields of the natural sciences and humanities. The explanation probably lies in his own approach to life and in his philosophy of education. As a high school student in Juarez Academy (Mexico) in his youth he played cornet in the band, sang tenor in the choir, and entered with enthusiasm into the local dramatic and musical presentations. A classmate of his both at B.Y.U. and Cornell University who later became

¹Board of Trustees Minutes, University Archives, April 21, 1925; B.Y.U. Faculty Minutes, Vol. 12 p. 295, April 27, 1925

a teaching colleague remarked on his love for the literary and artistic offerings as well as the scientific, and the man who served as his closest associate for a quarter-century recalled:

Dr. Harris believed in a well-rounded education. He had one. He had a better working knowledge in more fields of learning than any person of my acquaintance. Though his major field of study was science, he loved the classics in literature, art, and music, and knew of the accomplishments through the centuries of the great artists in these areas.²

This interest was translated into significant personal and budgetary support of the College of Fine Arts and its activities by Dr. Harris during his entire administration. His support made possible the development of a continuing series of guest concerts and lectures of the first rank, and the growth of a distinguished collection of art works.

Curiously, however, the president's enthusiasm for the fine arts was not reflected in the general education program which was prescribed for undergraduate students at B.Y.U. Beginning in 1921, his first year, and continuing throughout his tenure, candidates for the baccalaureate degree were required to present, beside their major and minor courses, general education credits from each of the following areas: Mathematics and Physical Science, Biological Science, Social Science, and English and Languages. (The number of quarter hours of credit required from each area was at first 15, and later 12, for the first three areas, and 18 for the fourth.) It was not until a revision of the general education program during the administration of Ernest L. Wilkinson, 1954-55, that a fifth area was added to include Humanities and Aesthetics. Thereafter students were required to present 15 quarter hours of approved courses to be selected from art, music, speech, archaeology, literature, history, languages,

²The classmate, Dr. George R. Hill, noted these qualities in an address at (then) Utah State Agricultural College, Nov. 16, 1945. Kiefer B. Sauls, secretary to the president and University treasurer, is quoted in Franklin Stewart Harris, Vignettes of His Life, B.Y.U., 1965, p. 13.

or philosophy.³

There is no doubt that President Harris believed that all students would be better prepared for life if exposed to culturally refining experiences. That he set up no mandatory program to channel them into courses in the fine arts is perhaps an evidence of his expectation that many students would take such courses on their own initiative if attractive opportunities were afforded them on a campus pervaded by a cultural atmosphere. The large numbers of non-majors who participated in the art, music, and speech and drama classes and activities, as well as the sizeable proportion who attended the cultural offerings of the University would suggest that this expectation was substantially fulfilled.

The establishment of the new college was evidently seen both as a contributor to the cultural benefit of the general campus community, and also as a center for fuller development of students seeking specialized instruction in the fine arts. The 1925-26 B.Y.U. Catalog announced the new college with the following statement (page 45):

The policy of the University has always provided for a liberal patronage of the arts. A constantly growing desire to offer greater opportunities to those whose inclinations and talents lead them into this field resulted in the organization of the College of Fine Arts.

At present the following departments are fully organized: Art, Public Speaking and Dramatic Art, and Vocal and Instrumental Music. Majors and minors may be selected from the work offered by the above named departments. It is the aim of the administration to have any course offered in the College, leading to a degree, the cultural equivalent to other general college courses, differing from them mainly in respect to the emphasis placed upon the study of the fine arts. Graduates receive the Degree of Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science.

The faculty of the College of Fine Arts are exceptionally well prepared. The heads of the departments in this college, as well as the majority of the instructors have received the benefits of extended

³ B.Y.U. Catalog issues, 1925-26 (p. 32) through 1955-56 (pp. 77-84).

study and travel in the recognized art centers of America and Europe. Since all bring rich teaching experience, and the work is so divided as to place each specialist in his own field, a high scholastic standing of work is assured. Adequate physical equipment for all departments has been provided.

To come in contact with the traditionally high esteem in which the Brigham Young University has always held the finer arts, in the naturally beautiful setting of which this school boasts, should prove inspirational to students of any of the fine arts.

The physical facilities of the three departments in the new college were conveniently grouped on the lower campus. The Art Department occupied half of the fourth floor of the Education Building, the other half housing the Geology Department. The Music Department had several offices and classrooms on the first and second floors of the College Building. The Department of Public Speaking and Dramatic Art used a little Theater on the second floor and a classroom, two offices, and a workroom on the first floor of the College Building. The 700-seat College Hall, on the third floor of the same building, served both the music and dramatic performance activities.

Dean Gerrit de Jong Jr.

At the same time that it approved the formation of the new college, the Board of Trustees appointed as its first dean a European-born musician who was teaching languages at L.D.S. University in Salt Lake City. He was what might be called a Renaissance man--a broadly educated individual with a zest for learning, a deep well of creativity, and an aesthetic sensitivity which made him an excellent choice for the position.

Gerrit de Jong Jr. was born in Amsterdam, Holland, on March 20, 1892, and attended school where every youngster was expected to learn English, German, and French in addition to his native tongue. He took his first piano lessons when he was eleven, and followed his early school drawing classes with the valuable experience of sketching from the art masterpieces in the celebrated Rijksmuseum of his native city. When his father's dry goods store burned down in 1906, the family moved to Salt Lake City to be near an aunt who had joined the Mormons earlier. The deJongs followed her into the faith later.

The younger de Jong continued his musical studies to the extent that means permitted, and when in his early twenties opened a piano teaching studio at 44 E. South Temple St. Although lacking the usual public school teaching credentials, he served as music director at the Murdock Academy, Beaver, Utah, 1916-18, and as instructor in languages at L.D.S.U., 1919-25. During the latter period he also directed the Swanee Singers' male chorus, conducted the 42-piece Mendelssohn Orchestra, and gave piano and organ lessons. He began studies at University of Utah in 1918, and was awarded the B.A. in 1920 and the M.A. in 1925. In 1911 he had married Rosabelle Winegar of Salt Lake City, and they were the parents of one son, who died in infancy, and three daughters.

She died in 1940. In 1951 he married Thelma Bonham, a former school principal at Aberdeen, Idaho, who later became a supervisor of secondary education at B.Y.U.

The dean-designate was not a stranger to either the B.Y.U. campus or its president. He had taught French and Spanish during the 1922 summer session at the University, and Dr. Harris enrolled his oldest daughter, Arlene, in both classes. While teaching in the Church school in Salt Lake City, one of Prof. de Jong's faculty associates was Marion L. Harris, a brother of the president.

"Everyone seems pleased at your coming," Dr. Harris wrote to the new appointee immediately after the public announcement. He asked him to come to the campus soon to get acquainted with the faculty and to prepare a writeup for the annual catalog which was to go to press the next month. Prof. de Jong complied, and in addition to the catalog material helped to prepare a 20-page illustrated brochure which the University published in August to announce the new college and the programs of its three departments. He moved to Provo on Aug. 1 to begin his duties, and set up a studio-office in the College Bldg. He installed his own Pease grand piano for use in giving private lessons, and a file and roll-top desk for his teaching and administrative materials. As associate professor of modern languages his teaching assignment beginning in September was all courses in German and the advanced courses in Spanish.

A little over six feet in height, and of athletic build, Dean de Jong was an impressive figure as he walked through the campus with long strides. His face was unlined, with a small moustache under his aquiline nose matching in color his thick brown hair which was combed straight back from a high forehead.

At 33 the new dean was younger than any of the department chairmen in the college he was to administer. Elbert H. Eastmond, professor of art, was 49; T. Earl Pardoe, professor of public speaking, was 40; and Florence Jepperson Madsen, professor of music, was 38. From the outset he contributed enthusiastic leadership to the entire college, and served as a strong supporter of each department. He also encouraged his faculty in their individual academic studies and creative activities, and attempted to provide examples for them himself. Among the ten regular faculty members in the college in 1925, the only one besides himself to hold a graduate degree was Bent F. Larsen, associate professor of art, who had earned the M.A. at the U. of U. in 1923.

Before coming to B.Y.U. Dean de Jong had taken graduate courses for a term at the National University of Mexico in 1921. In the summer of 1927 he traveled in Europe and studied German literature at the University of Munich, an activity which he resumed there in 1939. During his first sabbatical leave, 1931-32, he pursued doctoral studies under a fellowship at Stanford University, and received the Ph.D. there in 1934 with a major in Germanic Languages and a minor in Romanic Languages. In the meantime, he had been advanced to the rank of professor at B.Y.U. in 1929.

One of the duties of the academic deans in the 1920s and 1930s was to provide academic advisement to each of the students majoring in the departments of their respective colleges. At first Dean de Jong did this with the assistance of one part-time secretary who served two hours per day. A few years later this help was increased to four hours per day, but it was some 20 years before full-time secretarial assistance was authorized.

After his first year the Dean moved into a more commodious office-studio, Room 240 College Bldg., and continued to occupy the same location during the remainder of his administration which spanned 34 years.

Growth in Enrollment and Faculty

During its first year, 1925-26, the new college enrolled 95 majors, not counting students enrolled in summer school. The enrollment figures by classes were: seniors, 10; juniors, 18; sophomores, 16; freshmen, 37; special students (part-time enrollees) 10; unmatriculated, 4. The college total represented 7 per cent of the cumulative B.Y.U. enrollment for the year, 1,350.

All ten of the first graduating class who received bachelor's degrees in June, 1926 were women. Nine of the number were from homes in Utah County; the tenth from Paris, Idaho.